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ABSTRACT

Ways to promote the evaluation of teaching performance by peers are considered. It is suggested that the evaluator's task be extended to include counseling and coaching the instructor being evaluated in order to help him/her overcome deficiencies in classroom performance. The counselor/evaluator should start by scheduling a short meeting with the instructor to get acquainted and decide on dates for the counselor to visit the classroom. The remainder of the interview should be devoted to discussing the nature of the class the counselor will attend. Nine aspects of teaching are identified that the counselor should assess. After the first lecture attended by the counselor, a conference should be scheduled with the instructor to discuss all nine items. After attending one or two more lectures, another conference should be held. An example is provided of how one aspect of performance (class control) might be handled by the instructor. It is concluded that counseling and coaching can be an extension of teaching evaluation. (SW)

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Effective Counselling in Peer Assessment of Teaching

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the situation where an evaluator of college or university teaching performance detects facets of the evaluee's performance that require immediate attention and improvement. The suggestion is made that the evaluator's task be extended to include counselling and coaching the evaluee in order to enable him or her to overcome these deficiencies in classroom performance. A list of nine of the more important aspects of an instructor's performance is presented and, of these, the ones that most lead themselves to counselling and coaching are selected. The paper concludes with a sample of how one of these aspects of performance, viz., class control, is handled.

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Effective Counselling in Peer Assessment of Teaching

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Evaluation of teaching performance by peers is now an accepted and, in some instances, commonplace practice among universities. In most instances, this is done by request or, at least, consent of the faculty member. Evaluation is fine -- but how can it be made most beneficial to the instructor in question?

In many instances, much can be done by the evaluator in the way of suggesting improvements. As a matter of fact, perhaps the word "evaluation" is a misnomer and the word "counselling" would be a better description of what should be taking place.

Of course, much depends both on the keenness of the counsellor and the receptiveness of the instructor. The dedicated counsellor will diplomatically point out shortcomings and will offer to help the faculty member overcome these. The faculty member may be content with an evaluation of his or her teaching or may accept the offer of assistance. Much will depend upon how this offer is presented.

At the outset, the counsellor - or evaluator - would be wise to schedule a short meeting with the instructor. This should serve as a get-acquainted session and should give the counsellor the opportunity of gaining the instructor's confidence.

The counsellor should start the meeting with a few pleasantries in order to put the instructor at ease. He might ask a question or two to get the instructor talking. Then he should let the conversation flow from the instructor. The counsellor will quickly learn the nature of the person with whom he is going to deal. This will make his task much easier.

The first thing to establish is whether the instructor wishes to specify the dates on which the counsellor will visit the classroom. If he or she says "come any time" it may be a sign of confidence. But don't be fooled -- it may just signify bravado! Naturally, this arrangement is preferable to specifying mutually - agreeable dates. This latter arrangement might involve some special preparation and performance on the part of the instructor for the benefit of the counsellor. This, of course, is not desirable. Nevertheless, the wish of the instructor is paramount and, if he or she insists, the counsellor should quickly agree to this arrangement.

The remainder of the interview should be devoted to a discussion of the nature of the class or classes the counsellor will attend. If the instructor wishes to discuss any facets of his or her teaching that are causing trouble or insecurity, this would be time well spent. However, the counsellor would be wise not to try and extract this information if it is not freely volunteered -- he will find out for himself soon enough. Finally, the counsellor is well-advised not to get involved in the politics of the situation, i.e., to avoid discussions as to the instructor's tenure and/or promotion status. To satisfy his curiosity, the counsellor could, after the semester or term is over, check whether the instructor's student evaluations have improved and congratulate the instructor on any improvement in status. But, he should avoid getting involved in the promotion and tenure process itself.

The next step in this evaluative-counselling process is the attendance of the counsellor at the first class. Should he be introduced to the class or should he come in unannounced and remain anonymous and as unobtrusive as possible? The second arrangement seems more preferable. It

would be less likely to provoke a-typical behaviour patterns among both the students and the instructor.

Immediately, the counsellor can check the following, more mechanical, aspects of the instructor's teaching.

1. Does the instructor appear on time or late for class? (Later, does he or she stop on time?).
2. Does the instructor make sure that the seating arrangement of the class is satisfactory, i.e., is the class seated so that everyone has the opportunity to hear and see clearly? And can the instructor keep all students under his or her surveillance?
3. Does the instructor have any distracting mannerisms, such as pacing, juggling or throwing chalk, etc?

These are things that can be discussed at the first conference session between the counsellor and the instructor. If there are any faults in any of these areas, they should be clearly and vigorously pointed out by the counsellor. These are things that the instructor himself (or herself) can immediately improve upon without help from the counsellor.

As the lecture progresses, the counsellor should check the following:

4. Preparedness of the instructor.
5. The instructor's use of teaching aids, for instance, does the instructor use teaching aids, such as a projector, as a crutch to prevent lecturing and putting his own personality into the proceedings?
6. Speech of the instructor, specifically, with respect to
   i) diction
   ii) quickness or slowness

iii) loudness

iv) mannerisms

v) enthusiasm and conviction

The counsellor should make strong comments to the instructor regarding items 4 and 5. However, area 6 is one in which coaching and counselling, as well as evaluation, could pay great dividends. The counsellor can be of great help in the development of good speech and of good speaking habits, moreover, he can also help raise the instructor's level of enthusiasm and get him or her to speak with greater conviction.

Finally, the counsellor should check out the following facets of the instructor's teaching:

7. Does the instructor have control of the class -- or are the students riding him or her?
8. Is the instructor involving the students in the proceedings -- is he or she asking questions and eliciting answers from all the students?
9. At what level is he or she speaking? Is he or she speaking too far above the heads of students -- or too far below? Is the instructor throwing out enough new ideas?

Again, these last three are important areas of teaching in which extra coaching and counselling can pay off.

After this first lecture, the counsellor should schedule a conference with the instructor, to take place before the next lecture. The counsellor should discuss all nine items with the instructor -- and any others that may come to light. The counsellor should then attend one - or maybe two - more lectures and then schedule another conference with the instructor.

At this juncture it should be clear what items need special attention. Usually, these are among the above items 6 to 9. Class control, item 7, is an especially frequent one among young instructors. The counsellor should ask the instructor if he or she wants further help. If the answer is in the affirmative, the counsellor should suggest a series of remedies and attend the next few classes to see that these are carried out.

It is not the intention, in this short presentation, to go into a detailed discussion of the possible remedies for each item. However, as a sample, let us consider class control. The usual scenario is that of a large (about 150) freshman class of active young students whose interest in the subject matter is marginal. In the far corners of the class are several young couples whose main pre-occupation is romance. Among all these are several (not many, mind you) keen students who really want to hear what the instructor has to say. From the moment the students arrive in the classroom, there is a continual buzz of voices of people talking to each other.

The instructor must take control from the outset. He or she must demand that the students stop talking. The instructor may state that attendance is not necessary, but if a student comes to class, he or she must remain quiet during the lecture. The instructor should not start speaking until quiet is attained. If talking resumes, then the instructor must stop until talking ceases.

A series of questions directed at the romancing couples in the back rows could also serve to diminish the noise level in those areas.

The instructor should not use threats -- especially those that he or she is not sure can be carried out. Confrontation with individual students should be avoided. Patience and tact should be the instructor's main weapons.

If the counsellor coaches the instructor along these lines and the instructor is receptive, positive results are sure to follow.

This is, as said previously, a sample of how a counsellor can work with an instructor. Experienced teachers, acting as counsellors can suggest other ploys for other situations.

To conclude, we again state that our belief is strong that counselling and coaching, as an extension of teaching evaluation, can be extremely effective. It has to be tactfully suggested by the evaluator and freely and even enthusiastically accepted by the evaluee. True, it has its price -- additional hours of sustained effort by both parties. Inevitably, also, these extra hours of work will signify added monetary compensation and universities will have to face the question "how much of this coaching can we afford?" We hope the answer is "all that is necessary!"